

AN ADDRESS,

DELIVERED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE
BROOME COUNTY MEDICAL SOCIETY,

January 11, 1842--at the Court House in Binghamton, by

S. D. HAND, M. D.,

PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.

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ADDRESS.

Fellow-Citizens and Members of the Society:

In the whole circle of Human knowledge, few of man's investigations have rewarded him with so important benefits as his knowledge of medical science. This knowledge is peculiarly important to him because it throws a protecting shield around his dearest interests. Home, the domestic circle, all those endearing interests which cluster around the family relation, and which form so important an item in the sum of human happiness, come under the peculiar guardianship and protection of the physician. Other kinds of knowledge may enable a man to accumulate property, make a rich display, and exercise a powerful influence over his fellow man; it may enable him to satisfy the highest aspirations of a large ambition, to gratify every earthly desire; but let disease enter his habitation and lay its relentless hand upon a member of his family; let the grand enemy of man, Death, give him but a threatening look, and what value do you suppose he would place upon the single interest thus invaded or rather what value would he not place upon it? Learning, property, reputation, fame, he would barter them all freely, could health and comfort be again restored to his peaceful home. Like other great blessings that are habitual, we do not realize its importance. But however much some men may affect to despise the medical profession and its resources, take away from community its Physicians and its knowledge of domestic remedies, and you remove one of the principal items of the sum total of what constitutes civilization: indeed there is nothing that elevates us so far above the half civilized and barbarous races of men, as our knowledge of disease and its appropriate remedies. their ignorance upon this subject and its consequences form the most distressing characteristic of their Barbarism. The savage of our western wilds receives the arrow head of his enemy into some part of his body, and tho' it be to him a source of irritation and constant distress, he must endure it until death terminates his sufferings. The merest Tyro in surgery would by a simple operation give him instantaneous relief. A musket ball or perhaps the branch of a tree shatters an important limb, and the ignorant Barbarian suffers a

lingering death, or drags out a miserable existence, mutilated and entirely helpless. The intelligent surgeon would restore him again to health and comfort in a brief space of time, by a common and perfectly safe operation. Some of our most common diseases such as modern science would consider comparatively harmless, among savage tribes are almost uniformly fatal. Epidemic and contagious diseases occasionally visit the Indians of our western forests; in their ignorance they are totally unprepared to meet their attacks: they have no resource: universal panic and consternation seizes the most fearless among them—men who never knew fear, will quail before approaching disease, and tremble like children. Death has an undisputed sway: frequently not only whole families but entire tribes have been cut off in a solitary year, by the prevalence of a single disease. The same disease may visit civilized man, and he will witness its approach with a feeling of security: the resources of our art are such as to render it probable that its victims will be few and far between. Nor is the extraordinary fatality of diseases and injuries among uncivilized men to be attributed entirely to their ignorance of the healing art; the well intended unobstructed efforts of Nature would restore to health a large proportion of persons attacked with almost any disease however malignant: but it is among ignorant barbarians very much as it is among ignorant civilized men; where real medical knowledge is wanting, its place is usurped by Quackery. The unfortunate victim of disease is not left to the simple efforts of Nature, but is subjected to every kind of process, to every variety of torture that Human ingenuity and Human absurdity can possibly suggest; all with the humane intention of removing disease. Medical science has probably benefited mankind as much by exposing the absurdities and superstitions of former times, as by the discovery of the facts and principles on which the science is now based.

The science of medicine in its progress of improvement, has had to contend with difficulties peculiarly its own. The very great importance attached to the healing art, and the estimation in which successful members of the profession have ever been held, have induced great numbers of ignorant unprincipled men in every age of the world, to palm themselves off upon community as men capable of healing disease; and always by some new and unheard of but secret process: and the extreme anxiety of the diseased, and their readiness to grasp at any promised relief, have always supplied this class of men with a sufficient number of victims. The

history of Quackery from the early ages of the world down to the the present very enlightened era, and an exhibition of some of its workings even at the present time, would form an amusing but sad chapter in the history of Human affairs: It would be a melancholy story of Human depravity on the one hand, and of Human folly and credulity on the other. The sincere enquirer after truth, has had to meet this difficulty in every stage of his progress. One system of imposition and absurdity has been overthrown, only to give place to another perhaps still more absurd; and so strong has been the impression made, frequently, by some popular error, that the experience of ages has not been sufficient to disabuse the public mind. Even to the present day public opinion is strongly influenced by erroneous notions which have come down to us from the dark ages, and which science has demonstrated to be false long ago. Take for example the old notion that every thing is composed of the four elements, fire, air, earth, and water: this opinion is made the foundation principle of an extensive system of modern Quackery, and is regarded as fundamental truth, by that most absurd of all classes of Empirics called Thompsonians. Quackery is not confined to any age or any people. Men of this generation may smile at the exploded absurdities of the dark ages, or they may pity the ignorance and credulity of the poor savage: but at the same time impositions are palmed off upon mankind at the present day, different in kind truly, but not less absurd, not less ridiculous, than those that deceived our ancestors, or that now mislead the Indians of our forests. It is not confined to the classes of society that we call ignorant or illiterate. Men who seem to be tolerably well informed on other subjects, and who generally act from rational principles; on the subject of disease and medicine, cut loose from reason and give the free rein to their credulity!

The American people claim to be the most enlightened well informed people in the world—the most liberal minded, the most thinking people. The state of New-York is not considered in these respects a whit behind other portions of the republic; and Broome county—why that is one of the choice spots of the earth, its inhabitants are so independent minded—such investigators—so free from fanaticism and what is called humbuggery of every kind. We sit down and read the history of the dark ages, and are astonished that the human mind could wander so far from the paths of reason. The history of the Salem witchcraft excites in us feelings of the most startling horror: we wonder that so much intelligence

so much virtue, so much sturdy independence, as characterized our fathers, could possibly be mixed with such ridiculous such absurd credulity. The erroneous notions of the benighted Indian, the foolish mummeries of his medicine man, in which he vainly confides in case of disease, produce in us contempt mingled with commiseration for their ignorance and delusion. Could a full history of human credulity in all ages of the world, be spread out before the people of Broome, they would probably look upon themselves with a feeling of complacency—that we live in a more enlightened age and country, that with us at least knowledge has made such advances as to break the fetters of superstition and prejudice, and at length to set the human mind free. But what are the facts in the case? Why the men of the dark ages shall rise up in judgment against this generation! The believers in the Salem witchcraft, and even the barbarous tribes of our forests, shall put to shame the inhabitants of Broome county! They groped in darkness because there was none to lead them; on us shines the light of science. Long and laborious investigations have resulted in the establishment of principles which we voluntarily reject, to run after the most absurd delusions! I would not underrate the intelligence of my fellow citizens, I would speak *carefully, gently* of their faults, but duty requires that I speak *truly*.

Nothing is more common than for the enlightened inhabitants of the county of Broome to consult a *faith* doctor, to place their diseased friends with perfect confidence under the care of a man who removes disease by merely speaking the word of command, or laying his hand upon the patient, who has such a knowledge of Anatomy and Surgery that he can reduce three or four dislocations of the spine at a single operation, the patient all the while standing! Let a dancing master visit the county, a man whose insolence and profanity will disgust every decent well informed man, who knows no more about medical science than his well informed dog, and the very investigating people of Broome will receive him with a hearty welcome! In what capacity think you? Why as a physician! He will walk our streets with the dignity and arrogance of a Nabob, dealing out his blasphemous abuse freely upon every man who happens to cross his path! Yes farther—he is admitted into our parlors and allowed to come into the presence of our wives and daughters and their most important, most delicate interests, are committed to his scrutiny!

Let a man establish himself in the county directly from his me-

chanic shop, without any knowledge of anatomy and physiology, and not much knowledge of any kind, without any proper medical study, and but little intellect, he is considered perfectly competent to assume the most delicate and most difficult of all responsibilities, that of the general treatment of disease: the strong minded well disciplined medical scholar, who to years of well directed medical study, has added years of experience, is not considered as at all qualified to compete with him. This disposition to countenance Empiricism is not confined to any particular class of persons: high and low, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, men of character and of no character, are led by its contaminating influence. It is nonsense to say as is sometimes said, that quackery flourishes only among the illiterate and lower classes of society; it is not so. In this county the quack with some system or other of ridiculous mummary, walks into the house of the merchant, the lawyer, the minister of the gospel, the justice of the peace, the judge, the senator, men of age and experience, who have seen a thousand such bubbles burst, are willing to be cheated again and again. The statement I have made is no exaggerated tale; you all know that one half has not been told. It is not applicable of course, in its full extent, to our whole population: but let me tell you, the number of persons in community whose minds are free from every quackish delusion, is very small, much smaller than is generally supposed. This state of things is disreputable, it is lamentable, it is unworthy the age in which we live. I would not be understood that it is peculiar to the people of Broome—this county perhaps is a fair specimen of the state of New York and will compare favorably with other portions of the United States. But this condition of the public mind has its causes; those causes will be investigated and ascertained; they will be removed, *eventually*. Popular improvement in its onward and upward progress, will not leave this ground unexplored. Quackery in medicine will be counted among the things that have been. Posterity will look back upon its history, with as much astonishment as we do that of the Salem witchcraft, and with much better reason. In the accomplishment of so desirable an object the medical profession have important responsibilities devolving upon them;—and are surrounded by some peculiar difficulties. One difficulty is, the very general impression that prevails in community, and it may obtain with some members of the profession, that where quackery is countenanced, the business of the regular profession is diminished thereby: and therefore every effort

of the physician to accomplish its overthrow, is stigmatized as proceeding entirely from selfishness. Now nothing is further from the truth than this supposition. Quackery abstracts no business from the profession but what it returns with interest fourfold.— Where is the physician of common observation who has not seen disease *manufactured* by mal treatment of the system: and other cases where simple manageable cases of disease have been converted into a chronic derangement of the system of so much difficulty as to require the most careful and skillful attendance for months to repair the injury perpetrated by their fooleries? Such cases probably occur ten times, where any person is really benefitted in a single instance. I assert it without hesitation that the more quackery you have in a community, the greater number of physicians will be required and find employment. For every quack who is supported in this county, at least one more physician is needed, and will find support than would be necessary had he not settled within our borders.

About the only personal interest any physician can have in the matter is, from the single fact, that quackery has a tendency to bring down in public estimation the whole profession to its own degraded contemptible level. The well qualified skillful physician ought to have a standing in society as high as the man of any occupation whatever. But with large numbers of community, all who pretend to administer medicine, are classed together, and placed upon the same level: a level certainly low enough to comport with the deepest humility!

I have spoken at some length of the evils of quackery: I will now proceed to give my views as briefly as possible of the appropriate remedies. If the evil ever meets an overthrow it must be done principally through the influence of of medical men: and as a first and most important step in this work, I would abolish all quackery in the regular profession. The quack has certain distinguishing characteristics, the same as any other genus of animals; and when the man who claims to be a man of science assumes any of these characteristics, or adopts any of the practices which distinguish this class of men, he not only brings a stain upon himself, richly meriting our contempt, but he degrades the whole profession of which he is a member. The first thing to which I shall allude under this head is the course of conduct which we ought to pursue towards the class of men of which I have been speaking. Perhaps it is unnecessary for me to say, that we never should consult with

them or consent to practice in connection with them under any possible circumstances. The temptation to do this is sometimes very strong; but should always be promptly resisted: we should consult with no man who is not in regular standing with the profession. The medical man who will do it is unworthy the name of a physician, and possesses but a slight sense of honor as a man. Physicians sometimes admit in conversation, that *quacks* are good in some cases. This is an admission which should never be made, for the very good reason that it is not *true*. We should undoubtedly extend to these men the usual courtesies of society in our social intercourse with them; but as medical men we should exhibit towards them unceasing, uncompromising hostility; duty to ourselves to our profession, to society, requires of us such a course of action. It is unnecessary to quarrel with them, no man should so far demean himself; but on all proper occasions in our intercourse with society, we should hold them up in their true light. The man who is afraid to do this, is afraid to do right, and he who will sacrifice truth and justice for the sake of peace, would do well to retire from society, for mankind will certainly never be wiser or better for his sojourn among them.

One of the most perplexing difficulties with which the profession have to contend, is the prejudice excited in the public mind through the influence of quackery, against some of our most important remedies. The strong wide spread and most ridiculous prejudice against mineral substances as medicines, has its origin entirely from this source; and I regret to say that men are not wanting in the regular profession who instead of standing up manfully, to stem the torrent of popular delusion, and fearlessly expose the fallacy, indirectly give countenance to it; such men will admit in conversation, that physicians *do* use rather too large an amount of minerals in their practice, especially of *mercury*; they take special pains to state that their prescriptions are generally vegetable, and when speaking of a neighboring practitioner, they often remark by way of reproach—he uses a great deal of *calomel*, &c. Now language is inadequate to describe the contemptible meanness of such a course of conduct. This is real quackery; it is dishonestly lending support to ignorance, for the sake of a little personal advantage. It is most manifestly the duty of members of the profession to enlighten the public mind in reference to such matters. Under our present system of popular education, about all the information people have on medical subjects, must come to them through the profession;

and no absurdity can be more easily demonstrated to be false than the very common opinion, that minerals are more dangerous when taken into the system than other substances. Physicians have the information and it is very easy to communicate it, that the most active and dangerous poisons in existence, are from the animal and vegetable kingdoms, principally from the latter. It is a remarkable fact that those poisons that have produced far the greatest amount of misery in the world by their destructive influence upon the brain and nervous system, are entirely of vegetable origin. The mineral kingdom never produced *alcohol*, *opium* and *tobacco* : it is incapable of producing substances which like these will lay the *mind* in ruins, by making a wreck of that most noble, most mysterious structure—the brain. It is difficult to understand the origin of this prejudice against mineral substances as remedies for disease. Nature has kindly provided minerals in variety and abundance, as food and drink for man : and he finds not only his comfort, but his health, his very existence, depend upon their free use. And, that man in his most simple condition may make no mistake in this matter, nature has provided and thrown in his way these substances in abundant profusion. Soda, Iron, Lime, Potash, &c., substances which constitute a part of the human body itself, and which must be constantly and regularly supplied, are found in every part of the globe. The untutored savage finds the little streamlet from which he quenches his thirst, saturated with them. The civilized man as he draws the same cooling beverage from the depths of the earth, finds in solution abundant supplies from the mineral kingdom. People inhabiting some of the mountainous districts of Europe, who are confined to the water melted from their mountains of snow, fall into a distressing condition of mental and bodily imbecility. Whatever speculations may have been afloat on this subject, the want of a proper supply of mineral substances to the system, is probably among the most efficient causes of the disease called *Cretinism*.

I have taken this brief view of this subject, not that it is necessary to argue the question before men of science ; but to show how numerous and common place the facts, and how simple and conclusive the arguments, by which the absurdity of this prejudice may be demonstrated to any man of common sense. Nothing can exceed the folly of the man calling himself a man of science, who will give any countenance to this foolish opinion ; who will suffer himself to float along upon the current of popular ignorance, and who to gain

a slight personal advantage, will help keep alive in community a delusion which is one of the principal supports to quackery of every kind. Another of our most important remedies against which considerable prejudice has been excited, is blood letting. Now to attempt to discuss the propriety of blood letting with the quacks, would be the height of folly—the reason is, they are totally unqualified to conduct such a discussion: so indeed is every man in community, unless he be thoroughly versed in the science of Anatomy and Physiology: certainly no man is capable of conducting an argument on this or any other subject, who is entirely ignorant of the facts relating to the subject. The whole race of quacks are thus ignorant.—They generally deny the necessity of understanding anatomy and physiology at all: they are therefore not only unable to discuss the subject but even to appreciate an argument. The man deeply versed in science and of large experience, is the only man qualified to judge in this matter; such men have had this subject under investigation for centuries, and no practice in the whole circle of medical science is more firmly established, or more uniformly sanctioned than blood letting; and yet some Physicians speak of it as a necessary evil, to be resorted to only in cases of urgent necessity; and never if other remedies will possibly meet the emergency. Now this is nothing more nor less than quackery. It is basely giving countenance to opinions conceived in ignorance, and set afloat by the most unprincipled Empiricism. The duty of the Physician in this case as in every other of the kind, is to me very obvious; he should be honest, he should make no compromise with error. He may not be able to explain to a community unacquainted with the Philosophy of the human system the *modus operandi* of blood letting; he may not be able to demonstrate to the unlearned the reason why blood should be abstracted from the system in certain diseases; but it is easy to point to its effects; these are *decided, obvious, and immediate*, more so than almost any remedy we possess; and we have few active remedies which are so seldom injurious; by accident or otherwise; and if we cannot demonstrate the *modus operandi* of the remedy, we can generally demonstrate the ignorance of the men who disseminate the error: we can easily show community that they are not only ignorant of Physiology, but that they have never had a particle of experience of the remedy they condemn. They never have observed probably in a single instance its effect upon the human system. The very great number and variety of prejudices against our methods of practice would present an endless theme of remark, were I to pursue the subject; for

there is scarcely a remedy adopted by the regular profession, but what has been a subject of unceasing attack. Altho' we can at this time but barely glance at the subject, in pursuing this part of it, there is one error more to which I will briefly direct your attention; it has obtained a very general circulation and is unfortunately countenanced by some members of the profession—That is, the opinion that the remedies used by the regular profession are more dangerous than the simple roots and herbs of the Empiric; that if the regular physician does not succeed in relieving his patient, he will certainly make him worse; while the remedies of the quack are so very simple, that if they do not have their intended effect they will certainly do no harm. This opinion as far as it relates to men of science, may be true in some few cases.

In a profession as numerous as our own, we have some weak men, men who have not talent sufficient to meet its important responsibilities. Such men may fail to benefit, they may even injure their patients; medical men should not pretend to the contrary; but their mistakes prove nothing against the regular practice. The man who has a scientific knowledge of the human system and its diseases and who brings to his aid a strong discriminating mind, will seldom render the condition of his patient worse, if he cannot relieve him. Physicians should give no support to this very common error. They can point triumphantly to the general success of their practice, to their conquest over numerous diseases which were once very generally fatal, to their superior knowledge of others, by which their fatality has been diminished more than 50 per cent. They can allude with a proud satisfaction to the gradual increase in the average length of human life during the last century, just about in proportion as medical science has received an increased share of public attention; and this too in the midst of causes of disease, such as our simple and hardy forefathers never knew. These facts should be spread out before the public by the physician in his daily intercourse with them; the common saying that 'doctors kill about as many as they cure,' should be promptly rebuked; no man of science should so far demean himself as to silently listen to the base assertion: much less should he countenance the equally erroneous and more dangerous opinion, that the medicines prescribed by quacks are harmless, that if their prescriptions do no good they do no hurt &c. Of all the errors abroad in the world on the subject of medicine, this is probably the most dangerous. A premature grave has closed over

thousands, who from imbibing this foolish opinion have been induced for some trifling disease to try what they deemed a harmless experiment. Experience has taught them when too late, that the strongest constitution may be undermined and destroyed, by the indiscriminate use of even Roots and Herbs. The medical man instead of admitting even carelessly that the quack will do no hurt, should point to the unfortunate victims which every where surround us, and press home the question, who was ever benefited by their absurd mummeries? The active and dangerous character of their most common remedies should be explained to community, a large share of whom have never given the subject any investigation; but have continued to receive as truth, what they have heard often asserted and perhaps never contradicted!

I have extended my remarks to a considerable length upon that kind of quackery in the profession which consists in giving countenance to, or silently acquiescing in, the absurd opinions propagated through the influence of Empirics. I will now call your attention to that kind of quackery in the profession which consists in imitating the quack by certain practices which form the most degrading trait of *his* character. The first thing I shall mention under this head is the practice of various kinds of deception. Some physicians contend that this is absolutely necessary; that mankind are so ignorant, there is no other way of successfully managing them. This to my mind is a very curious argument! because mankind are ignorant, that ignorance must be pampered and confirmed, by the very men whose duty it is, and who alone have the power to enlighten them. The scientific physician has nothing to gain, but every thing to lose, by the ignorance of community upon medical subjects; while quackery is nourished and sustained by popular ignorance alone.

Some practitioners are in the habit of misrepresenting the condition of the patient they may be called to treat, by speaking of some trifling or perfectly manageable malady, as a disease of very great danger; in this way an alarm is frequently spread through a whole neighborhood in a case which should never have been heard of beyond the immediate family circle. How often do we hear of individuals who are not expected to live from day to day, and at a time when the public are anxiously awaiting the solemn event, which is to call them to perform the last sad duty to the unfortunate man, you pass by his habitation, and behold! he is diligently pursuing his usual business. The temptation to this kind of

tion may be very strong; but it is dishonest, and most contemptible; it has the worst influence upon the public mind; an influence most adverse to the interests of the profession. This is the very kind of deception by which the quack uniformly lays the foundation to his reputation; for if a man can treat successfully a most wonderful disease, he must be a wonderful man. Another kind of deception very nearly allied to this, is the practice of relating the history of most marvelous cases which have occurred under the observation of the practitioner; cases of such a character, (at least some of them) as to place them entirely beyond the scope of probability.— These cases of course have all been treated successfully!! Some physicians will sit for hours and deal out to their ignorant and credulous auditors, such entertainment as this. Of the moral character of such conduct, I will not speak in this place: but its influence upon community, is, to induce the belief and expectation of these strange occurrences, and to throw an air of mystery around medical subjects: a condition of the public mind upon which quackery can operate most successfully.

Another practice characteristic of the quack, and which is unfortunately adopted by some members of the profession, is to administer a great many medicines for the mere purpose of display, or to amuse the patient; and to each medicine they will give a most tremendously learned name, and pretend to expect wonderful effects from its operation, while in reality they are doing nothing, but silently awaiting the salutary operations of Nature. Now this kind of deception tends to foster ignorance, and will sooner or later be detected; it degrades the profession in the eyes of community, and destroys that confidence in them which is so necessary to the interests of medical science and the welfare of community.— Some men seem to be quacks instinctively, every thing they say or do seems shrouded in mystery, every look and action to conceal a stratagem! Such men make successful quacks; they never should study medicine and pretend to be men of science: what little knowledge they acquire, seems a disadvantage to them. When such men enter the regular profession, they generally bring a disgrace upon it, for which no benefits they can confer upon mankind will ever atone. To trace out the various deceptions practiced by them would be an endless task: they are the men who make a great many new discoveries in medicine, they deal in specifics— have secret remedies for almost every disease, remedies unknown to the rest of the profession: no subject is so simple but they make

of it a theme of wonder in the community.

Some practitioners are in the habit of greatly exaggerating the amount and character of their business; and not a child in the street but is a daily listener to their improbable stories. I once knew a physician who had *ninety* cases of Typhus Fever in one season, and treated them all successfully—at least so said every man woman and child in his neighborhood. Now this must have been a wonderful man, and it was very fortunate that these cases all fell into the hands of a man who could treat them so successfully; for I believe every case came under his care: I did not hear of another case occurring in the county. Some men always have an immense amount of business according to their own story, and yet every body knows that they enjoy an abundance of leisure!

These tricks strongly mark the quack, and when the man of pretended science resorts to them, he exhibits a small mind, little honorable feeling, and no real dignity of character: and as to his integrity, I will only say, the public would do well to investigate him thoroughly, before they commit to him very important responsibilities.

I will now proceed to the consideration of another very important cause of the disposition in the public mind to patronise quackery, and be deceived by its foolish pretensions—That is the universal ignorance of the Human system and its functions, which is well known to exist. The age in which we live claims to be an enlightened age: men push their investigations every where: no department of science or literature is unexplored. Years of intense study are spent to ascertain what the *ancients* thought, and to understand the medium of their communications. Men traverse the whole Earth—cross barren deserts—climb the burning mountain top—plunge into the regions of perpetual snow—spend years of privation in the trackless forest—and boldly encounter every hardship and danger, that nothing in the whole range of Human knowledge may escape their observation. And much pains is taken to diffuse the knowledge thus obtained throughout community by popular lectures, and by books of every variety of size, shape, and complexion. That kind of knowledge especially, in which man's personal interest is supposed to be concerned, is most assiduously cultivated: and yet the man deeply versed in all these kinds of knowledge whose acuteness and sagacity secure him from fraud and deception of almost every kind; in matters relating to his own system, is as ignorant as the untutored savage. The

most accomplished knave shall strive in vain to overreach or defraud him to the amount of one farthing, and yet the stupid, ignorant, swinish, quack (in consequence of this kind of ignorance) will bring him completely under his influence. The study of the human system as a science is the most interesting of any thing that can possibly attract the attention of man. He may search the universe throughout, to gratify his curiosity and enlarge the sphere of his knowledge: and yet he carries about with him in his own person, a system of machinery, more curious in its mechanism than the proudest achievements of ancient or modern art, more interesting and wonderful, as a display of Almighty wisdom and power than nature exhibits in any other of her works. But as a matter in which all men have a deep personal interest, it exceeds in importance almost every other kind of knowledge. A knowledge of anatomy and physiology should be thoroughly diffused throughout community; it should be considered an important branch of popular knowledge; and as such, it should be taught in our seminaries of learning. It always appeared strange to me that so much importance has been attached to the study of mathematics and the Languages, to the entire neglect of other branches of knowledge of the greatest practical importance.

Let a general knowledge of the laws which govern the Human system be popularly diffused, together with a thorough knowledge of the science of Chemistry, and the benefits conferred on society would be incalculable. The days of quackery would be numbered. The absurd theories which Empiricism has introduced, and popular credulity fostered, would vanish in the light of science, like our river fogs before the beams of a rising sun. Take the ridiculous theory of Thompson for instance. One of its fundamental principles is that every thing is composed of four Elements, Fire, Air, Earth, and Water. The school boy in his first lesson in Chemistry would learn to demonstrate the falsehood and absurdity of this opinion. Three of these pretended Elements can very easily be shown to be compounds: composed of substances entirely dissimilar to each other, and to the original compound — Another opinion put forth by the notorious Thompson—that Heat is life, and Cold is death, is equally conceived in ignorance. Let a man study the laws of the Human system as a science, and the manner in which animal heat is produced, and he would soon ascertain that heat instead of being a cause, is a mere result of life; it is only one of a thousand little circumstances resulting from a healthy

action of the living powers. The very common notion that diseases originate in a bad condition of the blood, would be at once and forever exploded, if the specific character of the blood were well understood, the manner in which it is produced and its peculiar office in the animal economy. The senseless tinkering with the system under pretence of cleansing the blood, and the foolish prejudice against Bloodletting as a remedy, would be at once and forever put to rest.

A knowledge of these sciences would not only put an end to quackery by enabling men to detect and consequently avoid it, but it would do more than any thing else to advance the progress of medical science in the profession.

Let the public be so enlightened as to be able to detect ignorance and Empiricism, (in the profession even) and science, talent, and moral worth, would be properly appreciated: it would hold out strong inducements to the medical man to cultivate science assiduously, and make the greatest attainment in his profession. But in the present state of public opinion a man's science, his industry, his intellect, and even his integrity, have very little to do in securing the public approbation. This is notoriously true! The subject of medicine unlike every thing else is considered a most incomprehensible mystery. It seems to be considered that some men have a knowledge of it intuitively: that though a man be unfit for any thing else, he may be a good physician: he may be a man of notoriously weak intellect, and yet be a very *able* physician; he may be flagrantly dishonest, confessedly so, and yet be entirely fit to be entrusted with the most important responsibilities; and that too under strong temptations to betray the trust. He may be stupidly intemperate, so as to unfit him for any ordinary business, and yet be a most excellent *Doctor*. Such is public opinion, very generally, such are some of the evils to be corrected by enlightening the public mind on these subjects. It ought to be well understood that medical science is like any other extensive and complicated system of knowledge; to be acquired and successfully practised in precisely the same way: that there is nothing mysterious or intuitive connected with medicine, more than in the cultivation of the soil, or in the practice of the mechanic arts: that the man of small intellect, will consequently be a small physician, that the man of dishonest principles, will find in the practice of medicine an ample field for the exercise of his peculiar characteristics; and he will not fail to avail himself of the opportunities thus afforded him.—

And the intemperate man is better fitted for any other business whatever, than for the treatment of disease. You may make of him a foreign ambassador, or set him to calculating the distance and magnitude of the fixed stars, but *never* admit him into the apartment of a man laboring under disease. Correct information on medical subjects might be very generally diffused, by the uniform, faithful, and well directed, efforts of medical men in their constant and extended intercourse with society; but the evils of which I have spoken will never be entirely corrected until the mass of community shall receive a large amount of knowledge of the subject as a part of their *education*.

I cannot dismiss this subject without expressing my sincere desire that the members of this society may give it their serious consideration, and if any vestige of quackery should chance to exist in the regular medical profession of Broome County, either individually or as a society, we begin the reformation at home; that before we give loud utterance to our complaints of the prevalence of quackery we bring ourselves to that high standard of honorable action which alone can secure the confidence and respect of community, and place the profession upon that high and dignified elevation where it properly belongs.